

(b) Does not arise.

**Postponement of Sixth SAARC Summit**

\*106. SHRI C.P. MUDALAGIRIYAPPA: SHRI SANAT KUMAR MANDAL:

Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether the sixth SAARC Summit scheduled to take place at Colombo had to be postponed;

(b) if so, the reasons therefor;

(c) the alternate date fixed for the Summit;

(d) whether India was consulted before the postponement;

(e) if so, the details thereof;

(f) whether Sri Lanka held India responsible for the postponement of the said summit;

(g) if so, the reaction of the Government thereto; and

(h) whether the postponement of the Summit is likely to affect the regional balance in South Asia?

**THE MINISTRY OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI EDUARDO FALEIRO):** (a) to (h). The Sixth SAARC Summit was scheduled to be held at Colombo on November 7 to 9. However, on November 1, Member states were informed that the king of Bhutan would be unable to attend the said Summit on account of unforeseen problems.

The President of the Maldives in his capacity as Chairman of SAARC, carried out consultations with other Heads of State/Heads of Government on this Summit. After giving careful thought to the views expressed to him by Heads of State/Government, he

came to the conclusion on November 6 that the Sixth Summit could not be held on schedule as Bhutan would not be represented at the Head of State or Government level. At the same time, he expressed the hope that after further consultations in the near future, the Heads of State/Government of the SAARC Member States may be able to agree on fresh dates for the Sixth SAARC Summit.

Following this advice, President Gayoom has already initiated consultations with Heads of State/Government on the possibility of convening a short, functional Summit in Colombo, preferably during the current calendar year. For this purpose, he sent his Foreign Minister, Mr. Fathulla Jameel, to India from 19 to 21 November as his Special Envoy to consult with EAM and PM on this question. We conveyed to him our hope that it would be possible to hold a Summit Meeting on the kind proposed during the year.

India's view as conveyed to the SAARC Chairman, President Gayoom, on the possibility as convening the Summit in the absence of one of the Heads of State or Government was that this would not conform to propriety or principle.

We have seen the statement made on November 12 by the Sri Lankan Foreign Minister, Mr. Harold Herat. It is not our intention to comment in any detail on the statement since we would not wish to add to the element of acrimony which has been needlessly injected into SAARC affairs. We should prefer to let the facts speak for themselves.

The postponement of the Summit is not likely to affect the regional balance in South Asia.

[Translation]

**Oil and Natural Gas Reserves in Bihar**

\*107. SHRI KAMLA MISHRA MADHUKAR: Will the Minister of